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ABSTRACT

Findings of a 2 year field study of community school conflict suggest that episodic involvement and emphasis on economic issues are the result of inadequate institutional provisions for sustained participation, deficiencies in the mechanisms providing observability of issues and ineffective channels for the expression, and mediation of dissent. These inadequacies are the result of depoliticization in the school board-community relationship and professionalization in the administration-parent relationship. When school-controlled channels became closed to other than supportive participation, dissent was forced into the externally controlled channels. This led to school board and superintendency turnover which brought about more responsive leadership resulting in the creation of new channels which integrated the school system and the community by increasing visibility of issues and legitimating dissent. The strength of "local" interests and relative weakness of school interests and the unequal balance of power in the parent-administration relationship suggest the need for additional structural provisions for the promotion of sustained involvement and the mediation of conflicting interests. (Author)

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# SOME STRUCTURAL DETERMINANTS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY-MAKING IN SUBURBIA: A CASE STUDY

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Political sociologists have recognized educational decision-making as a strategic research site for the investigation of political participation (Thompson and Horton, 1960) and community power (Dahl, 1961, Vidich and Bensman, 1958). Research on urban school systems has focussed on failure of urban systems to meet the educational needs of minority youth as a consequence of insulation and bureaucratization (Rogers, 1968, Gittel, 1967). The findings of this research support the assumption that decentralization, through increased public participation, will achieve "quality education" for minority children.

Research on suburban school systems suggests that insulation and professionalism are operative in these areas but the implications for suburban educational quality have not been drawn. The image of the superiority of suburban schools, as a consequence of high public participation in educational affairs, however, is not corroborated by these studies. The findings reveal that the average citizen tends to be even more delinquent in living up to the requirements of democratic citizenship in his role as a school voter than in general elections. (Carter, 1960, Foskett, 1959, Berelson, Lazarsfeld, McPhee, 1954). Participation, when it does occur, is reported to be based on economic rather than educational concerns (Martin, 1969). The school board has been characterized as an agency of legitimation rather than representation (Kerr, 1964).

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The viability of the local school board, on the other hand, has been upheld on the basis of findings of recent research on school board-superintendency turnover. Iannaccone (1967), for example, suggests that this turnover reflects the flexibility of the local system to respond to local values and changing socio-economic conditions. The failure of desegregation efforts and bond issue defeats in some districts is cited as proof of the strength of local control.

It is suggested here that the observed public apathy and emphasis on economic concerns may be an artifact of two factors: 1) research methods - the prevalence of one-shot studies which focus on the most visible aspects of a complex relationship and the rarity of a funded social scientist being on the spot when a conflict erupts; and 2) institutional arrangements which block participation in academic issues and channel dissent into economic protests.

The central problem of participation in a mass democracy according to Long (1962), and substantiated by the evidence to be presented here, is the deficiency in institutional provisions for vital participation. Verba (1969) has identified three prerequisites for participation in local politics: 1) perception that a decision has a direct impact on the individual, 2) ability to enlist social support and 3) efficacy (access to decision-makers, legitimacy of issue and belief that action will have an effect).

Citizen involvement in Eastport, the community under study here, conforms to the patterns observed in previous research: episodic participation in economic issues and relative apathy in relation to educational issues. This behavior is frequently attributed by school officials and activists to individual traits, primarily the dominance of educational "traditionalism" justifying minimum expenditures and resisting innovation.

The major thesis of this paper is that this state of affairs is fostered by institutional arrangements which minimize the capacity for sustained participation, deficiencies in the mechanisms providing for the observability of issues and ineffective channels for the expression of dissent and mediation of conflicting interests.

The depoliticization and professionalization of school affairs in Eastport and a norm of non-intervention created public apathy by reducing visibility of issues and efficacy in educational decision-making. These factors created a leadership and responsibility vacuum in relation to the schools within the community which Martin (1969) has identified as a consequence of non-partisan school governance.

Understanding of the structural basis of participation requires the longitudinal analysis of channels for participation, issues and participants. Although participation in Eastport is also related to political, social and economic issues within and beyond the local community, this paper will be confined to the analysis of institutional arrangements in the school board-community and school parent-administration relationships.

Data for this presentation were obtained over a $2\frac{1}{2}$ year period through observation of school board meetings, content analysis of newspaper articles and letters, participant observation of formal and informal meetings and the testimony of elite and non-elite informants. The first draft of this paper was read by the current superintendent of the school district and three board members who were most active in school board-community relations. The readers were asked to correct errors in the factual presentation and their suggestions were incorporated in this paper.

The School Board-Community Relationship

From 1945 to 1970 public participation in Eastport school affairs could occur through five channels: 1) voting, 2) the nominating process, 3) board appointed citizens' committees, 4) school board meetings and 5) ad hoc interest groups. None of these channels has been utilized to promote sustained involvement in educational affairs, thus participation is issue-based or episodic. Issues resolved through referenda are limited to finances and school board candidates. Attempts to influence policy-making must be channeled through ad hoc committees because of the absence of any specialized educational interest group.

During the period from 1961 to 1968 the administration of Eastport's schools can be characterized as unresponsive, insulated and professionalized. Under this type of administration, only supportive participation was permitted in the two channels controlled by the school system: citizens' committees and board meetings. Changes effected by the school board in 1969-70 served to "open" these school controlled channels, increasing visibility of issues and legitimating dissent.

A budget and bond issue defeat in 1969 and public criticism of the board's traditional methods of dealing with the community led to four innovations in the school-community relationship: 1) the co-optation of dissent; 2) provision of direct access to school trustees; 3) integration of school and other community agencies; 4) legitimation of involvement in educational issues.

This school district, located near a large urban center, is shared by three municipalities. There are four elementary schools, a middle school (7-8) and one high school (9-12) attended by about 6,000 children from about 45% of the 9,500 households served by the district. A majority of school parents are employed in the urban

center, whereas a majority of the non-school community is locally employed or retired. Several conflicts related to budgetting and redistricting policies have erupted during the course of this study.

VOTING. Voting in Eastport is dependent on the visibility of issues and the availability of alternatives. Voter turnout has increased with the rise in school costs, bond issues and contested trustee elections, as shown in Tables I and II. Ninety-seven residents voted in 1960. In 1970 the number had risen to 5,332.

TABLE I

Turnout at school tax elections 1960-1970

| YEAR | VOTE | | TOTAL VOTE | TOTAL BUDGET |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Yes | No | | |
| 1960 | 92 | 5 | 97 | $4,000,000 |
| 1961 | 92 | 2 | 94 | 4,300,000 |
| * 1962 | 1,471 | 428 | 1,899 | 4,700,000 |
| 1963 | 300 | 28 | 328 | 5,300,000 |
| 1964 | 102 | 6 | 108 | 6,000,000 |
| * 1965 | 256 | 62 | 318 | 6,500,000 |
| * 1966 | 428 | 440 | 922 | 7,300,000 |
| 1967 | 1,437 | 1,257 | 2,694 | 8,300,000 |
| 1968-May | 2,225 | 2,786 | 5,011 | 9,900,000 |
| 1968-June | 2,509 | 2,125 | 4,634 | 9,600,000 |
| * 1969-May | 2,312 | 2,843 | 5,155 | 10,900,000 |
| 1969-June | 2,638 | 2,985 | 5,623 | 10,900,000 |
| 1970 | 3,016 | 2,316 | 5,332 | 11,800,000 |

*Contested trustee elections

TABLE II

Turnout at bond elections

| YEAR | VOTE | | TOTAL VOTE |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Yes | No | |
| 1963 | 1,880 | 415 | 2,295 |
| 1965 | 2,647 | 1,611 | 4,258 |
| * 1969 | 2,403 | 2,659 | 5,062 |

*1969 bond issue and school tax presented on same ballot.
1963 and 1965 bond elections held one month after tax election.

Seventy-five per cent of the $11,800,000 school budget for 1970-71 was raised through local taxes and 21% through state and federal aid. The 1970-71 tax rate of $58.99 per thousand of assessed property value represents an increase of more than 110% over the 1960-61 rate of $27.87. The increase in school costs is largely due to factors beyond the control of the local school board: construction necessitated by increased enrollments (about 1400 additional pupils), plant deterioration, teachers' salary increases and inflation.

Eastport experienced its first budget defeat in the spring of 1968, but a revised budget eliminating $300,000 was approved a few weeks later. The 1969-70 budget, 20% higher than the previous year's, was rejected on two successive ballots, as was a bond issue included in the first referendum. The school system operated on a contingency budget during the 1969-70 year.

The 1970-71 budget, representing an 11.3% increase over the previous year, was passed by a 700 vote margin on the first referendum.

THE NOMINATING PROCESS. Before the school board reform movement caught up with the district in 1945, school affairs in Eastport are reported by "old-timers" to have been controlled by "back-room" politics and local interests. In 1945 a group of educational "cosmopolitans" instituted procedures for the non -partisan selection of school trustees.

Despite the 1945 reform, educational decision-making continued to be controlled by "local" interests through the domination of "inside" superintendents appointed by conservative school boards. Relatively stable costs were maintained by neglecting the school plant.

This led around 1959 to the activation of "cosmopolitans" who wanted to modernize the high school and replace a deteriorated elementary

school. Their involvement in the selection committee brought about the nomination of more "liberal" school trustees who were powerful enough in 1961 to appoint an "outsider" to the superintendency.

Limited participation, usually about 200 residents, has characterized involvement in the nominating process from 1961 to 1968. Although any citizen was eligible to participate, few were aware of the process until 1970.

Success of a 1966 opposition candidate for the school board was indicative of a growing "anti-school" faction and a weakening of ties linking the schools and school parents. The activation of dissidents, several of whom objected to the relatively "closed" nature of school politics, became evident in the nominating meetings in 1968. By 1970 this faction was able to change two aspects of the committee's procedures. They by-passed a "liberal" incumbent who wished to remain in office in favor of an alleged "conservative," and "opened" the nominating process by submitting the slate of selectors to public vote along with the annual budget.

BOARD APPOINTED CITIZENS' COMMITTEES. The procedure for involving citizens in educational decisions under Dr. A's (the superintendent from 1961 to 1968) leadership served to isolate the schools from the non-school community because it by-passed local influentials. The three committees set up during Dr. A's term were dominated by high status cosmopolitans and compliant minority group representatives who had weak ties to local social networks. The first two committees were said to have "rubber-stamped" Dr. A's plans and the building proposals they developed were most strongly opposed by local influentials. Comparison of voter turnout on bond issues with turnout on school taxes (Tables I and II) reveals the strength of this opposition. These figures also suggest that both school parents and the community at large were generally apathetic about school affairs until 1967.

The third citizens' committee is said to have provoked a serious rift between Dr. A and the school board when it discovered the superintendent's monopolization of information which blocked school board and community visibility of serious overcrowding and dilution of services in two elementary schools located in the more affluent sections of the district.

The committee report described the overcrowding as "intolerable" and recommended redistricting and construction of a wing at the new middle school to house sixth grade pupils. The superintendent proposed construction of additional classrooms at the most overcrowded school. The emergence of school board authority was indicated by its rejection of the superintendent's proposal. Dr. A resigned in the summer of 1968 and his successor, Dr. B, is said to have been chosen for his expertise in community relations and success in implementing innovations.

In the fall of 1969, following the budget defeat, the school board took the first step toward bringing opposition into the system when it invited several of the most vocal critics to participate in three citizens' committees concerned with finances, long range planning and educational goals.

SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS. When this study began, bi-monthly open board meetings were typically attended by about two-dozen people including the president of the district's independent teachers' association, a few staff members, PTA presidents and a few active parents. Since the board maintained a policy of unanimity, most decisions were made in closed sessions and the annual budget was announced only a few weeks before election, educational affairs were not salient to the community at large. Public attendance at open board meetings rose in 1968 and 1969 when overcrowding and increased costs became visible.

The public apathy which characterized school-community affairs prior to 1968 was fostered by the insulation of decision-making and monopolization of information by the superintendent and school activists. Dr. A is reported to have believed that the up-grading of the system required strong support of the cosmopolitans, a compliant school board and suppression of participation by the community at large which he believed to be dominated by "local" interests. Criticism at school board and local school meetings was attributed to "conservatism" or personal dissatisfaction. Critics were accused of "attacking the schools" and excluded from participatory roles. Several informants told the writer that they stopped attending school meetings because they were a "waste of time."

The board's traditional method for handling problems involving the community can be described as "pseudo-democratic," (Verba, 1961) and served to alienate school parents as well as the community at large.

In the spring of 1968 the board mandated the transfer of all sixth grade pupils from the two overcrowded to the two underutilized elementary schools for the 1968-69 school year. The board then met with school groups to explain the decision. In the fall of 1969 the board announced a redistricting plan involving about 200 families and again agreed to meet with community groups. The testimony of several participants suggests that the meetings increased alienation because the board did not consider alternatives. (One board member told the writer, however, that changes were made as a result of the meetings.)

Similar methods were used in the board's provisions for participation in the 1969 budget process. Traditionally the budget was prepared in closed sessions. In 1969 the board's invitation for public participation in budget discussions was ignored by most residents. When the first referendum was defeated, the board's refusal to respond to community demands for cuts was viewed by many residents as

"arrogance" and proof that the board represented elitist interests.

Board recognition that the budget defeat indicated a loss of community confidence led to the second innovation: the institution of informal communication channels providing community groups with direct access to the board. Two new board members and school administrators devoted several evenings a month to private home meetings with known dissidents. Contrary to the view of the previous administration which attributed opposition to "anti-school" attitudes, these board members reported that much of the opposition was based on misinformation and lack of awareness of the board's declining authority and a rise in state and teacher authority. (Confusion resulting from the impact of property reassessment on school taxes is believed by one board member to have been a major factor in the '69 budget defeat.) They concluded that a sizeable segment of this supposedly "affluent" community was unable to afford the school tax burden. (Another board member, not involved in these meetings, does not support this conclusion because of the lack of statistical data on the relationship between vote and income.)

The 1970 budget cuts reveal school board responsiveness to two specific charges which emerged in the private meetings: "top-heavy" administration and over-emphasis on psychological services. Cuts in these categories and other economies combined with the restoration of state aid (which had been reduced in 1969), enabled the board to reduce a projected 20% increase to 11.3%. These cuts, incidentally, were scored by many school parents.

The board's awareness of public confusion and its need for broad public support were responsible for further structural innovations which strengthened the board's ties to municipal officials, school parents and local influentials.

The 1970 pre-election period was in sharp contrast to the polarization which characterized school-community relations in the two previous years. There was no visible evidence of an organized anti-budget campaign and only a few letters appeared in the local press. (Most of the letters were concerned with changes in the selection process.)

AD HOC GROUPS. Several ad hoc groups have appeared during the course of this study to oppose or support the school budget. Economic protests have typically been led by influentials in local neighborhood, business and social organizations. School groups have typically been organized by parents independent of the PTA.

Since this study began only one group has made visible efforts to influence the school program. This case will illustrate the effect of superintendent leadership on participation. During Dr. A's term parents who perceived inadequacies in the school program were reluctant to pursue group efforts to effect change because of the superintendent's reputed hostility to parent pressure. Prior to 1968 several mothers complained, as individuals, about the inadequate facilities for pupils in the special education program.

Dr. A's tactics for handling such complaints usually served to humiliate mothers, eliciting an emotional response which reinforced the "neurotic mother" stereotype (explained later). No parent in this category was able to obtain group support until 1968 when Dr. A placed the elementary special education classes in a church across from one elementary school. This decision made the treatment of these pupils visible for the first time, alarmed several parents with children in these classes and brought about their encounter at school board meetings. Dr. B, unlike Dr. A, responded sympathetically to the parents'

first demand for transfer of pupils to a school and improved transportation facilities. This was followed by parent investigation of the entire special education program and further demands for program improvements. In the fall of 1970, after two years of effort, these requests were realized.

Reports from several sources reveal that mothers have been responsible for two other ancillary programs in Eastport elementary schools: provision of music instruction and specialists for pupils with "specific learning disabilities." The first occurred before 1960; the second resulted from private meetings with administrators and trustees in 1968. Mothers involved in the "SLD" program told the writer that it took several years to obtain this program because of Dr. A's resistance and the inability to enlist social support through the PTA. The source of this resistance stems from Dr. A's efforts to professionalize the Eastport school system.

## The Administration-Parent Relationship

Data obtained from 39 mothers who have attempted to influence the school program reveal several mechanisms which suppressed parent involvement in educational decision-making during Dr. A's administration. These mechanisms were: administrative control of information and concealment of system inadequacies; the individualization of problems and the atomization of parents.

From the comments of PTA officials and "old-timers" there is some indication that these mechanisms were based on Dr. A's efforts to professionalize the school district. Rumors that before his arrival the schools were "run by mothers" suggest that there may have been a real need to protect administrators and teachers from sub-group pressures. They had the unanticipated consequence of promoting apathy and weakening administrative ties to school parents noted in the previous section.

Before 1970 there were four channels of communication between the school and parents: 1) the classroom teacher, 2) the administration, 3) the school board and 4) the PTA. According to administrative procedures, problems must first be taken up with the local school principal. If not resolved at this level they can be pursued with the superintendent. The school board is the final recourse. The Eastport PTA functions primarily as a service organization and according to its by-laws members cannot "interfere" with administrative policies. A narrow interpretation of these rules defines PTA involvement in curriculum as illegitimate. These factors, combined with the "mystique of school excellence" reduced parent visibility of system inadequacies and the ability to enlist the social support necessary to influence the administration and school board.

According to the public image of the Eastport schools promoted by real estate interests and school officials, the school district is one of the best in the county, thus there is no recognized need for other than supportive parent involvement. Based on such standard criteria as class size and services, the district ranks only 21st among 39 other county districts. It is plagued by some of the same problems the author found in schools located in the so-called "better" neighborhoods of the New York City school system (Stewart, et al, 1969): increases in teacher turnover (20% per year) and inexperienced teachers, overutilization and dilution of services in all elementary schools. The past two school board presidents have asserted, in spite of these facts, that elementary school standards have been maintained. The administration has no systematic methods to assess the effects of teacher inexperience and turnover and few parents are aware of these issues.

The school board is dependent on the administrative staff for information on the school program. These presentations are essentially testimonials. The administration has not developed any methods for the systematic evaluation of on-going or innovative programs. Objective data on system-wide pupil performance is rarely presented at school board meetings. The emphasis on out-put variables (test scores and college admissions rates) prevents any analysis of performance in relation to in-put variables. In a 1968 comparison which did include in-put variables, Eastport's "gifted" pupils were reported to do better than their counterparts in 12 allegedly comparable suburban districts and "average" pupils not as well as their counterparts in these other districts. Occasional references to pupils working "below grade level" and inadequate programs for non-college bound students have not received extensive public consideration by board members or the community.

Institutional control of information and selection of issues to be submitted to public debate, prevents school parents from challenging the "mystique of school excellence" because of the complexity of the educatinnal enterprise and limited parent knowledge of the system as a whole. Reviews of programs at local schools are similar to the testimonials presented to the school board. Administrators tend to utilize "pseudo-democratic" methods in presenting new programs to parents. When parents raise questions about a program in public meetings, administrators typically suppress critical discussion by labelling issues as "individual" problems. School board maintenance of the "mystique of school excellence" may force principals to suppress parent criticism which could be interpreted as personal role failure. Thus system needs are given priority at the possible expense of client needs.

Parent awareness of any system problem is further limited by the confinement of communication to bureaucratic channels which is based on two assumptions: 1) that all problems are due to individual inadequacies

and 2) an equal balance of power in the parent-principal relationship.

Several of the mothers interviewed reported that they are reluctant to raise questions at public meetings. Some because they are aware of the labelling of criticism as deviance; others because they "don't want to make trouble for teachers." Few parents will pursue an issue beyond the local school because of the fear or resignation induced through the mothers' socialization to the schools. These attitudes reflect parental acceptance of professional power and expertise.

The chief source of concern among most of the mothers who were interviewed is the discrepancy between the ideal and actual school program. Mothers were critical of what they perceived as an emphasis on "traditional" teaching methods and "stereotyped" materials in direct contrast to official emphasis on "individualized" instruction and "creative" teaching methods. Several mothers with children in the elementary schools complained that many teachers had inadequate training in child development and classroom management. Negative attitudes toward school and "underachievement," which the mothers attributed to ineffective teaching, were said to be frequently diagnosed by teachers and principals as psychological problems and referred to the school psychologist. This diagnosis was challenged by some of the mothers who were professional educators or psychologists. Their efforts to pursue these issues have typically ended in frustration because principals tended to: 1)support the teacher, 2) claim that "no one else has complained," or 3) claim that the power of the teacher's union makes it difficult for him to interfere.

The emphasis on psychological reasons for learning problems is generally accepted by many staff members and parents and precludes assessment of the child's total learning environment. While there may be many instances of psychologically-based problems, the requirement of private discussion of most issues prevents discovery of any system problems by fostering "pluralistic ignorance" (Merton, 1957, p. 322).

The potential for enlisting parent support necessary to effect change is reduced by this factor and the "neurotic mother" syndrome.

According to many school authorities, children with learning difficulties are usually from "problem" homes and their mothers have a tendency to blame the schools for the child's failure. This interpretation serves to reduce system responsibility for a large segment of the school population in a community described by school officials as having "many" problem families. It is also an effective mechanism to "atomize incipient opposition" (Martin, 1969) and contain criticism at the local level, thus reducing school board visibility of parent opinion.

The relatively low level of parent involvement in school affairs was indicated by the fact that only 50% of the school parents were registered to vote in school elections in 1969. In 1968 class mothers, appointed by the PTA, refused to promote the annual budget which had been one of the major requirements of this role. These facts and the emergence of complaints about the school program in the 1969 budget campaign, led to two innovations which provided parents with direct access to the school board. The board sponsored forums at all local schools to hear parent concerns and an educational goals committee which was headed by many vocal critics.

The goals committee legitimated dissent in educational issues by inviting participants in small home meetings to discuss "weaknesses" as well as "strengths" in the existing school program. According to the summary report (sent only to participants): "The overall tone of the reports was friendly toward the school system as a whole. . .Many of the reports were. . .inclined to the favorable opinion that the very capable children and the clearly not-capable children were being well-served. . .criticism. . .seemed to center on a concern for the

'average' student and even more sharply. . .on the 'non-college bound' student."

For the current year the goals committee has invited community involvement in the study of 7 selected areas of the school program. Finally the school system is participating in two extra-community projects: a regionally-sponsored systems analysis of educational needs and a state-sponsored effort to redesign school programs.

Although the goals committee has legitimated parent involvement in curriculum and the school forums provide direct access to the board, parents still lack an institutionalized channel for enlisting group support or mediating conflicting interests (related to the current program). Comparison of the efforts of the special education parents and the unsuccessful efforts of parents concerned with the discrepancy between the ideal and actual program, suggest that participation in both the school board-community and administration-parent relationship requires the conditions identified by Verba: visibility of issues, ability to enlist social support and efficacy.

## DISCUSSION

The episodic character of participation in educational affairs in Eastport and emphasis on economic issues will be analyzed here as the consequence of three structural deficiencies: 1) the absence of channels for sustained communication between the school board and community; 2) inadequate structural mechanisms providing for public observability of issues and school board observability of public opinion and 3) ineffective channels for the expression and mediation of dissent within the school system.

These inadequacies are the result of depoliticization in the school board-community relationship and professionalization in the administration-parent relationship. Under an unresponsive administration

internal channels for participation became "closed" to criticism. While the insulation of decision-making and suppression of dissent reduced controversy within the internal system, the effects of the changes eventually created public visibility of issues and led to the activation of externally-controlled channels for participation. The board's policy of unanimity further reduced public visibility of issues. The concealment of controversy within the board and between the board and the administration led some to perceive the board as a legitimating agency. The board's knowledge of the school system was limited by administrative control of information and its knowledge of public opinion was based on board members' image of the community.

Administrative control of information and concealment of issues removed the basis for citizen involvement by reducing public visibility and efficacy and indicates institutional sources of citizen failure to meet the role requirements postulated by the classical democratic theorists.

Merton has suggested that there may be a "tendency for outsiders to develop unrealistic images of non-membership groups which, if they are positive reference groups, lead toward unqualified idealization. . or if they are negative reference groups lead toward unqualified condemnation." (Merton, 1957, p. 351) During the period of insulation the administration served as a positive reference group for the board while the community at large functioned as a negative reference group.

Where the school system serves as a positive reference group the "unqualified idealization" of educators has blocked critical discussion or challenge of professional decisions. This created a leadership and responsibility vacuum on the school board which was duplicated within the community by the inability of community groups to become involved. The depoliticization of the schools thus promoted apathy and public irresponsibility because of the failure to create alternative

structures providing meaningful sustained citizen participation in school affairs.

The 1970 meetings between the school board and community and school groups provided such alternative structures. The effects: increased visibility of decision-making, legitimation of criticism and board responsiveness, strengthened school ties with the community which decreased the alienation within the local groups and diffused the potential for mobilization by opposition leaders in 1970.

Because of the self-selective basis of participation in the new channels, however, they do not insure the "structural provisions for informing authorities about the state of public opinion" which Merton (1957, p. 355) has identified as a functional requirement for any form of organization. The school's vulnerability to the pressures of the strong local network of neighborhood, social, religious and business organizations suggests that school decision-making has not been removed from the political arena. These local interests are not counterbalanced by equivalent structures to promote the interests of school parents. The weakness of the within school network caused by the inadequate communication channels linking administration and parents represents a possible source of continued strain.

## SUMMARY

Episodic involvement and emphasis on economic issues in Eastport has been analyzed here as the result of inadequate institutional provisions for sustained participation, deficiencies in the mechanisms providing observability of issues and ineffective channels for the expression and mediation of dissent. The apathy and alienation fostered by these inadequacies were the consequence of depoliticization and professionalization.

When school-controlled channels became closed to other than supportive participation, dissent was forced into the externally-controlled channels. This led to school board and superintendency turnover which brought about more responsive leadership resulting in the creation of new channels which integrated the school system and the community by increasing visibility of issues and legitimating dissent. The strength of "local" interests and relative weakness of school interests and the unequal balance of power in the parent-administration relationship suggest the need for additional structural provisions for the promotion of sustained involvement and the mediation of conflicting interests.

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